

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

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Turkey: No reactions despite several protest letters: 35 unionists still in prison

Brussels, 27 July 2009: In a letter (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/09-07-22_Joint_ITUC-ETUC_letter_KESK_arrests.pdf) from last week the The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represent workers throughout Europe and the world, including Turkey wrote a common letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr Erdogan. ITUC and ETUC are protesting against the constant harassment, dismissal, random judicial proceedings and arrests of members and leaders of our affiliate, the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK). As we write, 32 persons still remain in prison, without access to due process and in contravention of Council of Europe and ILO standards.

"It is of course completely unacceptable that the public sector union in Turkey is being targeted ahead of the upcoming negotiations on working conditions, by means of detentions that even contravene Turkish legislation and international standards. Citizens of a democratic country cannot be held arbitrarily, and certainly not for several weeks and months without access to due process" said Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary.

The ITUC has already written letters to the Turkish government on several occasions (29 May, 15 June and 18 June) protesting the numerous arrests of members and leaders of KESK and one of its main affiliates, the teachers' trade union Egitim-Sen. On 28 May, 35 of them were detained, of which 22 remain in prison to date. They include KESK Women Secretary Songül Morsümbül, former KESK General Secretary Abdurrahman Dasedmir, and Egitim-Sen Women Secretary Gülçin Isbert. Ten KESK members and leaders were already in prison before that time. There has been no response whatsoever from the protest letters.

Taking into account that next month, on 15 August, negotiations on working conditions for public sector workers will be initiated, which the Turkish authorities refer to as "collective consultative talks", which in itself is in breach of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention 98 on collective bargaining, it is impossible to consider these events as anything else than severe and systematic anti-union harassment, and a serious infringement of ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association.

The rights of workers' organisations can only be exercised in a climate that is free of violence, reprisals or threats of any kind against their leaders and membership. The ITUC and ETUC jointly therefore firmly urge the Turkish government to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all the arrested KESK and Egitim-Sen members and leaders.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 312 affiliated national organisations from 157 countries. Website: www.ituc-csi.org <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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